

A MESSAGE FROM . . .



BOB RILEY
Governor, State of Alabama



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State Forester

Thousands of Alabamians and out-of-state visitors will be taking advantage of our state's natural resource recreational opportunities this summer. Few states have as much or as diverse natural resource offerings as Alabama.

We have approximately 23 million acres of forestland in our state growing over 16 billion trees. Our forest base is the size of Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island combined. We have over 47,000 linear miles of perennial streams and rivers in our state, ranking seventh in the nation. One-twelfth of all ocean-flowing water in the United States travels through Alabama.

These healthy, abundant forests and pristine streams and rivers create a wealth of biodiversity. Alabama ranks fourth in the nation in total number of species of plants and animals, even though we rank only 29th in size. In total number of plant and animal species per acre, we are second only to Florida. Alabama is home to 1.4 million of our nation's white-tailed deer and 350,000 of its four million wild turkeys.

One of the reasons Alabama has an abundance of forest-related resources is because of the land management work being done by the Alabama Forestry Commission and private non-industrial landowners. In Alabama, 95 percent of our forests are privately owned. This represents 440,000 timber ownerships with 50 percent of all forest owners owning less than 500 acres of land. Combined, these same lands make up the second largest commercial forest in the nation, second only to Georgia. They also support Alabama's number one manufacturing industry, the forest products industry.

Because of our forests' importance to our economy, the care of them is vital. Through multiple-use forest management programs like the Alabama Forestry Commission's TREASURE Forest program (acronym for Timber, Recreation, Environment, and Aesthetics for a Sustained Usable RESource), we can help ensure that our state's forests and natural resources will not only meet the needs of our citizens today, but will be there for the citizens of tomorrow. ♣

At the annual Southern Group of State Foresters meeting held recently in Little Rock, Arkansas, urbanization (or Wildland Urban Interface) was one of the major topics. Cities are rapidly encroaching on what was once rural farm and timberland, bringing with it many problems for the forestry and fire communities.

According to the results of the Southern Forest Resource Assessment released last year, urbanization accounted for 68 percent of the forestland clearing in the state. With populations rising as well as cities and towns expanding their boundaries, the forest community is already seeing and will continue to see changes in the areas of fire protection and forest management.

One of the greatest changes has been in the area of fire suppression. Years ago rangers with the Alabama Forestry Commission responded to wildfires and put them out by plowing a fire line around them. Now in many urban areas, rangers protect homes, businesses, and other structures from destructive flames by utilizing the same practice.

Another area affected by urban sprawl is forest management. Already one of the easiest and cheapest tools of forest management, prescribed burning, is being lost to land managers and landowners in some urban areas. In most places near large cities a prescribed burn will not pass the smoke screen test. Other more expensive methods of herbaceous weed control and site preparation must be used. In addition, public opinion of other silvicultural practices and harvesting methods must be addressed by land managers.

Forested land around large urban areas is very important. It filters drinking water and storm runoff water, provides buffers from visual and noise distractions, and helps cool the temperatures in hot summer months. Because of these benefits, it is important that land managers continue to be able to practice forestry in urban areas.

With the continuing urban dynamics, it will be important that people in the forest industry and fire services sit at the table with policy and decision makers in these urban areas. If our interests and concerns are to be heard today and in the future, we must become a part of the process by which decisions are made. ♣